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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [IZ](#) [NL](#)

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS: IRAQI CHRISTIANS ASK FOR SECURITY,  
LEGAL REFORM

REF: BAGHDAD 1953

Classified By: Political Counselor Andrew C. Mann for reasons 1.5(b, d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: On June 24, poloff met with six Iraqi Christians, who lobbied for U.S. support to improve the security and legal situation in Iraq. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Background: Dutch NGO IKV Pax Christi sponsored a visit to the Netherlands by six Iraqi Christians, from June 20 to July 6. The group will meet members of the Dutch parliament and foreign ministry. Due to safety concerns, the group is not meeting journalists. During the June 24 discussion, the group agreed that poloff should not report their names, but describe the group as "six Iraqi Christians, including two senior Christian leaders." According to the group, Christians total 500,000 in Iraq, with perhaps another 500,000 abroad. The group suggested that given the political, historical, and cultural influence, Iraqi Christians might be thought of as "20 per cent" of the population.

13. (C) Security concerns: Representatives stated that despite their optimism at the start of the war, radicalism has spread and stability has declined. Violence and kidnapping are also spreading. They are experiencing "fear and terrorism." They have heard rumors that U.S. soldiers are engaging in terror attacks. In the north, the Kurds are "not protecting Christians...there is no trust." Two thousand students at Mosul University are not going back to school because they do not feel safe.

14. (C) Legal concerns: One member of the group described Christians as "second class" citizens and asserted there are no constitutional protections for Christians. Shia and Sunni political groups are dominant -- there is "nothing for minorities." Another member stated he was not criticizing the Iraqi constitution, but "it's not being implemented...we need rule of law." Another added that "we thought the United States would bring democracy." He said the group wants "international guarantees" that civil rights will be protected. Another concluded that "we don't want money...we want security and legal reform."

15. (C) Legal concerns, continued: One member listed four examples of institutionalized discrimination against Christians. First, in northern Iraq, schools with one Muslim student are required to teach Islam, whereas 51 per cent of the students must be Christian to teach Christianity. Second, Christian judges are prohibited. Third, the central government is taking Christian land and giving it to Muslims. Fourth, the law provides that if a parent converts to Islam, the children must also.

16. (C) Poloff reviewed the U.S. commitment to Iraq and democracy, as reflected in our aid programs, soldiers who had given their lives, and U.S. diplomatic efforts. Some members expressed surprise at the information. Another responded, "we don't question your commitment, but we lack information."

Another member of the group had met with staff from Embassy Baghdad, but others noted the significant security risk involved of visiting U.S. officials in Iraq. Poloff urged the group to focus on concrete recommendations for improving their situation, as well as continued communication with the USG and Embassy Baghdad to the extent the group's personal security permits.

17. (C) Comment: The group's self-importance and contradictory assessments of the Iraqi constitution do not strengthen their arguments. At the same time, the group's lack of information on U.S. efforts in Iraq is cause for concern. Reftel's news, as well as the group's visit to the Netherlands, suggest that Iraqi Christians are developing their political clout. End comment.  
Gallagher